

*White Plains, NY* – U.S. Representative John Hall (D-NY19) and Westchester County Clerk Timothy Idoni joined together today to announce their support for federal legislation to eliminate the staggering passport backlog that is currently causing significant travel problems for New Yorkers.

New passport requirements that went into effect this January have caused a backlog of about 3 million passport applications pending that have not been processed. The new passport requirements are a result of “The 9/11 Act,” legislation that Congress passed in 2004, which now requires Americans to show passports when traveling from Western Hemisphere countries that were previously exempted, including Canada, Mexico, Bermuda, and other Caribbean countries.

“The State Department has known about these new passport rules since 2004,” said Hall. “But in another example of this administration’s incompetence, the State Department has been caught unprepared for the predictable increase in passport applications due to these new requirements.

Because of the State Department’s poor planning, hundreds of thousands of Americans have to postpone plans to conduct business overseas, begin a study-abroad program, visit overseas relatives, or take a vacation.”

Due to this backlog, Hall’s office has had to intervene to help 130 people obtain passports who would have otherwise had to cancel their vacations or business travel.

Hall’s office recently assisted Charlie Nagy of Continental Village, NY get his passport after he waited twelve weeks and was unable to speak with anyone at the Department of State. After Nagy called Hall’s Carmel office in a panic, they were able to intervene and get the Norwalk, Connecticut passport office to send him his passport within 4 business days.

“Congressman Hall and his excellent staff helped me to obtain my passport at a time when it looked as if my once-in-a-lifetime trip to Ireland to visit with my relatives was in serious jeopardy,” said Nagy. “In fact, if you did not act as quickly and as effectively as you did, the trip would probably have been cancelled with the likely outcome of my never being able to have the opportunity to visit with my Irish relations ever again.”

“While I’m happy to help my constituents obtain a passport or anything else they need, they shouldn’t need intervention from their Congressman to receive the normal government services that their tax dollars pay for,” said Hall.

“We recognize that national efforts to provide for safe and secure travel are causing inconvenience to travelers awaiting United States passports. And so we thank Congressman John Hall for his strong support of legislation designed to help eliminate the enormous passport backlog which has inconvenienced many Westchester residents. Further, I encourage residents to let our knowledgeable staff help them apply for a passport as soon as possible. Routine passport applications only take a few minutes and the staff at the Westchester County Clerk’s Office is expert at assisting with more complex cases.” Westchester County Clerk Timothy C. Idoni.

Legislation that Hall voted for in the House would permit the State Department to waive certain restrictions on the reemployment of retired foreign service officers who are trained and authorized to process passport applications in order to allow the department to recruit and hire

such officers to help meet the demand for passports, including providing assistance in the investigation of fraud in the connection with an application. Under current law, when such retirees are rehired, they can only work up to six months out of the year, and the amount of money they can earn is limited; otherwise, their retirement benefits may be reduced. Under this bill, by allowing the department to waive these restrictions, retirees can work for a full year and continue to receive their retirement benefits. Allowing the department to hire back experienced staff will help the department expedite passport processing and eliminate the backlog. Hall and other U.S. representatives from New York are urging the Senate to pass legislation equivalent to what the House passed and calling on the President to sign the bill into law.

"The State Department was unprepared for the increased demand in recent months and must continue to bolster its efforts to clear the existing backlog of passport applications, especially now during the busiest travel months," said Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY18). "With the advance notice they had, the State Department's total lack of preparation is inexcusable. My office has worked with hundreds of families to help sort out passport issues, and we will continue to help people in need. The legislation the House passed last week is an important step in the right direction to solve a problem that was foreseeable and totally avoidable."

Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY17), Chair of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said, "Inefficiency and poor planning at the State Department has left Americans scrambling to get their passports as their vacation, business, education plans are delayed. The Foreign Affairs Committee held hearings on this issue recently and the House passed legislation to fix this problem to get Americans traveling again."

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